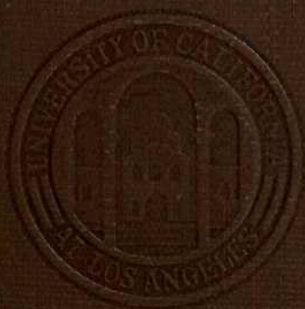
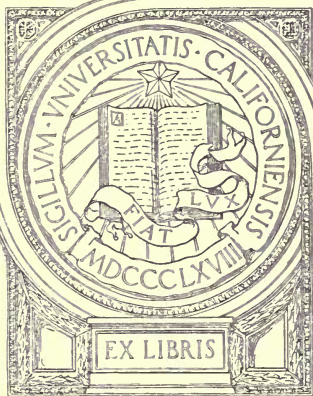




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CONSIDERATIONS
ON THE
PRESENT STATE
OF THE
CHURCH-ESTABLISHMENT,
IN LETTERS
TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND THE
LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

By JOHN STURGES, M.A.
PREBENDARY OF WINCHESTER,
AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

L O N D O N :

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LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

MY LORD,

THE long suspension of religious controversies between the different denominations of Protestants in this country, the uninterrupted liberty and security with which all of them have professed their respective opinions, and exercised their respective modes of worship, and the terms of amity which have for the most part appeared to subsist between them and the Established Church, had I believe produced a general persuasion; that as we were all grown wiser

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about

about the subjects on which we differed formerly, so we were grown more reasonable, liberal, and benevolent with respect to those things, on which we may still differ; that there was little reason to apprehend a revival of dissensions and animosities, which are always the effect of prejudice and passion, and on religious subjects are peculiarly unbecoming.

I confess, I am disappointed in seeing even a single instance of that spirit, which I had flattered myself had been totally extinguished. That people should be of one mind in matters of religion, either with respect to the substantial part of it, or the form in which it is to be administered, a very moderate knowledge of human nature will teach us never to expect; but that notwithstanding these differences men should treat each other without bitterness, with moderation and candor,

candor, is an expectation, which in these times I should have thought not quite unreasonable. I protest, my Lord, when I now hear of * ‘ our venerating
 ‘ surplices, gowns, cassocks, and hoods;
 ‘ † when I see every kind of civil and religious evil charged to the account of
 ‘ Episcopacy; and am told ‡, that all Human Legislation is oppressive to conscience;’ I feel myself ready to believe, that we are set backward in the world three or four generations; and can with difficulty be persuaded, that we are in truth advancing towards the end of the eighteenth century.

* Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Non-conformity, for the instruction of Catechumens. By R. Robinson. Approved by the Eastern Association at Harlow, Essex, and signed, by order of all, by the Moderator. Lect. 5.

† Lect. 3. throughout.

‡ Lect. 9.

Intemperate Censure is not fitted either to convince or to conciliate reasonable inquirers ; but it has led me, as it probably may others, to reflect on the subject with some attention, and to consider, divesting myself as much as I could of a natural partiality to a Church of which I am a Member, and a Profession to which I belong, how far our Ecclesiastical Establishment, as it now subsists in this country, is an Institution fit for the purposes it was meant to answer, both with respect to Religion and Society; how far the Clergy of England are worthy Ministers of the Religion of Christ, and useful Members of our Civil Community.

The Principles, on which Establishments in general, and our own in particular are founded; the Tolerating Spirit of the Church of England with respect to Christians of other denominations; the Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction assigned to it by the Laws of our Country; the Provision made for its Clergy; their Learning and Freedom of Inquiry; our Public Forms in which they officiate, their Duties, and their Manners, are particulars, which naturally offer themselves on this subject. But it is a subject, my Lord, like all others, where human institutions and numerous bodies of men are concerned, in which it is fruitless, it would argue only an ignorance of our nature, to expect absolute perfection. Comparative merit is all, that the best governments and wisest institutions can claim; imperfections and defects will in all the works of man every where occur to us; time and a change of circumstances will produce them, where they did not originally exist; and we must be satisfied with those institutions, where they are the fewest and least; we must be contented to esteem those excellent,

where they are mixed with what is good and valuable only in a small proportion.

Permit me, my Lord, to address the reflections I have been led to form on this subject to your Lordship; the eminence of your station in the Church, and the eminence of your character in that station, will I hope give this address some propriety.

L E T T E R II.

*On Establishments in general, and that of
the Church of England in particular.*

WITH some persons, my Lord, the word *Establishment* is itself criminal; they reprobate all Human Authority, all Human Opinions, which respect religion, as unlawful; as infringing their own liberty, and derogating from the Supremacy of Christ. I will beg leave to state the principles, on which, according to my conceptions, all Religious Societies must be founded; and shall endeavour to shew, that all, which are designed for any permanency, (for a congregation in a field, which never meets again, is not worth calling a society) must in effect admit, whatever they may

profess to do, Human Authority for their regulation, must concur in Human Opinions as a bond of union ; and that Establishments, as such, are not on that account unlawful ; inconsistent with our liberty as men, with our allegiance to Christ as Christians.

Such authority may be ill-employed, such opinions may be ill-founded, and improperly imposed ; violence may be exerted by the one, in order to enforce the other ; by their abuse they may both become pernicious ; but it no more follows from thence, that the principle on which they are used is unlawful, than that, because there are in the world many bad Civil Laws, therefore all Legislation is unjust.

If Religion were to subsist only in the hearts of individuals without the concurrence

currence of others, or any external profession of it ; if God had not meant, that in this instance, as well as in all others, we should be Social Creatures, the Truths and Precepts, which we collect by our reason, and which are delivered to us by revelation, would then in their naked state be sufficient to make us in this manner religious: we might certainly think of God as we pleased, and offer to him in what manner we pleased our solitary worship. But if we are not satisfied with that, if we are prompted by our nature to unite with others in the adoration of the Supreme Being, and feel our religion imperfect without doing so, we must in some respects agree with those others ; there must be some mutual compliances ; and certain regulations must be admitted, both with respect to the Outward Form of Worship, and the Opinions conveyed by it.

Without

Without some regulations of the Outward Form in which the Worshipers are agreed, it is impossible that Public Worship can subsist even in its simplest shape ; and as the reason of this worship, the manner of our addressing God, and the duties which we suppose him to require from us, arise from the Opinions we form concerning him, concerning his attributes and government, it is plain, that without a certain Agreement in these opinions it is impossible for different persons to join in the worship of God, and in giving or receiving Religious Instruction, which usually makes part of it. A Jew or a Christian could not join with an old Heathen in worshipping his numerous and imaginary deities. A Protestant cannot concur with a Papist in offering his prayers to the Virgin Mary, to Angels, and to Saints. The same prayers also, and the same instruction, cannot well

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suit

suit those Protestants, who differ about the Object of their worship, or about the Necessity of good works to salvation.

Every United Set of Worshippers must therefore agree in certain Forms and Opinions ; and they must make such Agreement the condition, on which others may be admitted to their Society. They must prescribe, like all other societies, these conditions for themselves ; and those, who do not chuse to comply with them, must either not enter into such a society, or retire from it.

‘ But this, it is said, is an infringement of our Liberty, an oppression of Conscience ; it is usurping the Supremacy of Christ ; and giving Human Opinions that authority, which is only due to Divine Revelation.’

That

That Absolute Liberty is inconsistent with every species of society, whether civil or religious, is most certain; it can only belong to detached, insulated individuals. The moment we begin to act in concert with any of our fellow-creatures, this liberty is narrowed; we must submit to some rules, and be content to lie under certain restraints with respect to others, which it is necessary for our own good that they should lie under with respect to ourselves. The Liberty of the Freest States never was and never can be more than this; it can only be a Qualified Liberty, as great as is consistent, not with the good of any one citizen, but of all taken together. And when in any sort of society this is possessed in such a degree, every wise man knows, that he possesses all which can from the nature of things be had. If there be any, who chuse to prefer to it the Absolute Liberty

of a solitary State of nature, with them I will not reason; but leave them to find in that state an equivalent for all the blessings of Society.

‘ But Conscience is oppressed by such conditions.’ What, if it be in the power of him, who dislikes them, not to oblige himself to the observance of them? if he be at liberty not to make part of that society, which requires it? Can any injury be done; can the conscience of any be wounded, where the contract is voluntary; where this alternative is offered, either enter into such a society and accept the conditions of it; or abstain from the one, and be exempt from the other?

‘ The interposition also of Human Authority in matters of Religion is usurping the Supremacy of Christ.’ But
without

without certain Regulations no Societies can exist ; as the Societies are Human, the regulations made for them must be by Human Authority. We find in the Scriptures the doctrines and precepts of our religion ; they are there offered to the reader, who may make what use of them he pleases ; who will understand them in that sense, which shall approve itself to his mind. But if many persons chuse to join in an external Profession of this religion, this profession must be administered in a certain form, and by certain persons ; the naked Doctrines and Precepts will not administer themselves any more, than the abstract Idea of Justice will be sufficient to answer the purposes of a State, without applying it, making it effectual, and giving as it were a body to it, by laws.

Whatever Regulations are made for Christian Churches, are supposed and
 professed

professed by those who make them, to be agreeable to the commands of Christ, to be the means of carrying those commands into execution. Is this usurping Christ's authority? We all, I presume, acknowledge God to be the Supreme Governor of the world. We are all I suppose ready to allow, that it is from him we derive our notions of Justice; that it is his will we should exercise this virtue towards our fellow-creatures. But did any reasonable man ever conclude from hence, that making Laws for the purposes of Practical Justice amongst men was impious with respect to God, was intrenching on his sovereignty? The truth is, that without the interposition of Human Authority, in its different degrees, Public Religion and Public Justice could not subsist.

There

There remains another charge on Establishments, ' that they impose on men ' Human Opinions, and give them an ' Authority, which is only due to Divine ' Revelation.' It has been said before, and is indisputable, that a certain Agreement of Opinions with respect to God is necessary for those, who would join in religious worship. Now, who is to be judge for any given Society, what those opinions shall be? The Society must undoubtedly judge for itself. The warmest advocates for Religious Liberty plead for the right of Private Judgement; that men should be permitted to judge for themselves. Nothing is more incontestible. And shall not a Society have the same right of judging for itself? Is this commendable in an individual, and unlawful in a Society? They may both be mistaken in forming their opinions; this is the consequence of human

man

man infirmity; but they are both the only and the proper judges for themselves:

And this Judgement on Religious Subjects must be exercised; for men will differ about them, and the Scriptures, which we all allow to be the Revelation of God, will no more interpret themselves, than the doctrines contained, teach; or the duties prescribed in them, execute themselves. Each Society therefore will adopt those Opinions, which seem to them true; and they will be, like all other conclusions of our minds on the subjects proposed to them, Human Opinions; they must and can be no other.

These, my Lord, are the principles on which, according to my conceptions, all Religious Societies must be founded; that

they are lawful, I think is undoubted ; and pretty apparent, that they are necessary. For we shall find those Sects of Christians, who most disclaim Human Authority and Human Opinions, if we attend to things themselves rather than to the names by which they are called, are, in fact, from the necessity of the case, whatever they may profess, obliged to use them both. The minute regulations of a single Independent Congregation, to which the Members of it must conform about the time, place, and manner of worship, are the same in *kind* with the numerous Laws of an Established National Church, and differ only in *degree* ; it is all of it Human Authority. The Opinions by which the different Congregations of Dissenters are distinguished from one another, and from the Established Church, are in effect the Confessions of Faith of those

those Congregations *; and these all consist of Human Opinions. The truth is, neither We or They are in fault for using these Human Instruments; it is a matter not of choice, but of necessity; such is the nature God has given us, that without them Men cannot be made to act together; there can be no Society, either Civil or Religious.

I have been led, my Lord, thus far in discussing these First Principles, because they affect our own Establishment in common with all others; though it was not so much the intention of these Letters, which I take the liberty of addressing to your Lordship, to controvert the

* In some Congregations the Minister makes his own Confession in form; in all it must be understood; for there must be a certain Agreement between him and his Congregation:

See Prot. Diff. Catechism, Part ii. Quest. 93.

Forms and Opinions of other Churches, as to consider the Present State and Circumstances of our Own. Before we looked at the Superstructure, it seemed but reasonable to examine whether the Foundation was as unsound and insecure, as some writers by their confident assertions would endeavour to persuade us. But the Foundation, my Lord, is good; the Rights, which the Church of England exercises with respect to her own Forms and Opinions, are Rights which must belong to Every Church; she does not violate those of other Churches, or of Individuals, by forcing men into her pale against their consent; she claims no independence, no exemption from the power of the Civil Magistrate; and makes no pretensions to Infallibility.

Without Toleration no Establishment can be lawful, can be defensible. The
Right

Right of any Church to chuse her own Forms and to settle her own Opinions can only be maintained (and in what I have already said has only been maintained) on the footing of leaving others to enjoy the same Right without injury or molestation ; of letting them worship and teach as they please, provided their worship and teaching be not hurtful to the State ; in which case only the Civil Magistrate can justly interpose. But the Tolerating Spirit of our Church is a matter of such importance in the present inquiry, and Toleration has been enjoyed in this country so completely in the present age, that it well deserves to be the subject of a separate letter, to which I beg leave to reserve it.

Civil Government is imperfect, is unable to effect the purposes for which it is designed, if all sects, all societies of

men be not equally subject to its authority. Of this authority the Church of England does not wish to be independent; she sets up no spiritual claims of disobedience. Our earlier History abounds with the mischiefs arising from the incompatible powers of a Pope and a Civil Government; the dissensions, the wars, the miseries, which arose from hence, are familiar to us; and we are from habit apt to consider the principle of Ecclesiastical Independence as peculiar to Popery. It was indeed maintained by that Church more openly, and more desperately, (for there was no species of political wickedness that was not employed to maintain it) than by any other; but it is not confined to that alone; it may subsist under other forms, and be the ruling maxim of other Churches, which profess to be the furthest removed from Popery: but wherever it be found

it is hostile to Civil Government, and deserves to be treated as such by the Magistrate who is the supporter of it.

The Church of England regulates her own Forms and declares her own Opinions; but in so doing she lays no claim to Infallibility. She judges for herself, as an Individual does, and acts accordingly. She supposes herself right, as every Individual must do, when he acts to the best of his judgement; but does not treat others, as if they were necessarily in the wrong*. Whatever is said in our Articles of her Authority can amount to no more than this; it can be interpreted no otherwise consistently with other passages of the same Articles, and

* See Art. 6, 20, and 34; and Hoadly's Answer to the Representation of the Committee of the Lower House, &c.

the general principles of the Reformation, on which they were framed, ' Every Church, as has been already said, must have Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies' for herself and for her own use, ' and Authority in Controversies of Faith ;' that is, a power of declaring her judgement, in order to determine, what her sense of Scripture is, and her interpretation of it, concerning them. This is a power consistent, as the Church of England professes it to be, with the supreme authority of Scripture ; and which is in fact exerted, from the necessity of the case, by those Congregations, who most disclaim it.

The Principles then, my Lord, on which our Establishment is founded, I apprehend to be unexceptionable ; whether in the application of these we have been

so fortunate in all respects, is a matter that will admit of more dispute.

As to mere Forms and Ceremonies, I should have thought all controversy about them had been at an end, if I had not been lately convinced of the contrary. Opinions are a subject of more consequence; and as it is undoubted, that the Members, and especially the Ministers of a Church, must to a certain degree concur in them; so it is no less true, that such being the necessity, a Public Collection of these Opinions, for the purpose of Uniformity, should be as short, as plain, and as comprehensive, as the end proposed will admit; that the Members of a Church may not be loaded with unnecessary conditions, or others be unnecessarily excluded from it.

In a large collection of Speculative Opinions, obscure and disputable by their nature, it is impossible, that great numbers of persons can perfectly agree ; agree I mean after full inquiry and examination ; some will acquiesce without making such inquiry, others will dissemble, and all perhaps will think themselves entitled to use a latitude, that is not so much authorised by the terms in which their Assent is expressed, as by the general principles of our nature and the constitution of our mind. In the mean time the end proposed will not be answered ; and it is probably unnecessary, that it should : Unanimity in that degree will never in fact be produced.

As Christianity also should be made as much as possible in the public profession of it, what it is in itself, a Religion of bene-

benevolence and concord, Christians should be invited by every conciliating, every accommodating measure to join in one profession; all invidious distinctions, all unnecessary impediments should be removed; smaller differences should be dropped by all parties, provided that in greater things they can be made to agree. Now to multiply the Public Opinions, by which one Church is distinguished from others, on those subjects especially which are difficult and disputable, is to multiply the conditions required from those who would accede to it, and to make their union with it less practicable,

I confess, my Lord, that our Articles appear liable to these objections; the particulars of them are too numerous; the subjects of some of them of a most obscure and disputable kind, where it may seem unnecessary and perhaps improper to

go so far in defining; on both these accounts the Assent required from our Clergy may appear too strict, and other Christians may be discouraged from joining in communion with us.

That such Objections should now lie to our Articles, is what might reasonably have been expected, notwithstanding all the abilities of the persons who compiled them, notwithstanding all their merits in the common cause of Protestant Christianity. Men were at that time in some measure new to the subject of Church-Establishments; they had not formed just notions of Religious Liberty; and Toleration was neither understood or practised. These topics have been since discussed with freedom and ability; religious prejudices have worn off, and the present modes of thinking are become more liberal and tolerant. They did as much

as could be expected from them; and if their System be compared with those of other Reformers in the same age, the comparison would probably turn out much to their advantage; but this is no reason, why their work should not be corrected and improved at a subsequent period, when we are possessed of great advantages, and furnished with considerable means of improvement.

Such a Revision, my Lord, both of our Articles and Forms, undertaken at a proper time, when the public situation of our country will admit of attention to these internal concerns of it, under the authority of the State, by the Governors of our Church, the Successors of these venerable Reformers, and conducted as it would then be with sobriety and good sense, would much contribute to her interests and honour; the ease of her

own Ministers would be consulted by it, many objections removed, and the good opinion of reasonable and moderate men of all parties conciliated.

Might I presume, my Lord, to state, what appears to me the proper ground for forming a Confession of Faith, for drawing the line of Separation between one Christian Society and another? Every Church will, as she has a right, judge for herself with respect to her own Opinions. But whatever those Opinions are, the leading and most important only, what she judges *essential* to True Christianity, should be selected and brought forth for Public Use; where to distinguish and subdivide is unfit and pernicious. Speculative men in private may do this as they please; in public it only marks out and multiplies differences. The Basis of every Establishment should be made as
broad

broad as possible, that all, who agree in great points, may be comprehended in it. These striking features, these leading principles of our Religion are all that should be expressed in Forms of Public Worship; they comprise all the Necessary Subjects of Public Instruction.

Now as the reason of requiring from Ministers an approbation of the Opinions of their Church, is to obtain assurance from them, of their being qualified to officiate in the prescribed Forms of Public Worship, and of their conforming to those Opinions in their Public Instruction; whatever makes no part either of the one or the other, should also make no part of a Confession of Faith; it has nothing to do with the object of it. The Forms indeed of Public Worship will necessarily contain in them, either expressed or implied, all the Doctrines, which are meant
to

to be the subjects of Public Instruction. The Confession of Faith therefore and the Liturgy of a Church should be Counter-parts to each other; their relation is mutual; if the former contain less than the latter, it is deficient; if more, it is redundant; and it is from this redundancy, that reasonable objections are most likely to arise.

If therefore that Form of Public Worship be the best, which, consistently with the Opinions of the Church who prescribes it, is the most simple, the most intelligible, the most comprehensive; that Confession of Faith, which most exactly corresponds to this Form, will be the best likewise.

L E T T E R I I I.

*On the Tolerating Spirit of the Church of
England.*

I HAVE already said, my Lord, 'that without Toleration no Establishment can be lawful or defensible; that the Right of any Church to chuse her own Forms and to settle her own Opinions can only be maintained on the footing of leaving others to enjoy the same right without injury or molestation; of letting them worship and teach as they please, provided their worship and teaching be not hurtful to the State, in which case only the Civil Magistrate can justly interpose.' To make others think and believe what You chuse to prescribe, is impossible; to make them profess such

Opinions and Belief, which they have not; to make them observe religious Forms founded on these, which they esteem unlawful or disapprove, is unjust. But when those, who dissent from the majority in these things, have the liberty, not of thinking and believing as they please, for this cannot be taken from them, but of expressing these opinions and belief by Public Religious Worship, as they shall chuse; (the security of the State being always presupposed) they have every thing, which reason and justice can require.

Yet it is surprising, how long men have been in acknowledging principles so reasonable and obvious. When the Protestant world broke loose from Popery, they felt indeed sufficiently from recent and cruel experience the severe tyranny, to which they had been so long subject. It was natural to suppose, that they would immediately

immediately renounce those principles, which had been the foundation of it. They abjured the Supremacy of the Pope, and rejected the absurd religious tenets of his Church; but to grant men liberty in matters of Religion, seemed not once to occur to them; the different Sects had no notion of Christianity in any other form than their own, and in this they thought it lawful to oblige all others to concur. Popery, as their common enemy and of the most dangerous kind, was treated, and justly treated, by all with most severity; but there is no reason to commend the conduct of the Protestant parties towards each other; almost every one of them was in its turn intolerant; and as they were possessed of power, inflicted on those, who differed from them, injuries, not perhaps quite the same in degree with those inflicted by the Church of Rome, but the same in kind, and to be justified

only on the same principles. A striking instance this of the slow and difficult admission of Truth into the Human Mind, when the access is shut against it by the love of power, by false notions of interest, and by old prejudices. *

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* Another instance of this, and of men's inconsistency with their own principles, was the constant opposition of America, to the admission of Bishops for the spiritual purposes of the Church of England in that country; for I have ever understood, and most assuredly believe, they were intended for these only. This I think appears from Archbishop Secker's words quoted in Dr. Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, p. 191, 2d. edit. with the design of shewing the contrary. " The proposal is (saith the Archbishop) " that the Bishops shall exercise such jurisdiction " *over the Clergy of the Church of England in those parts,* " as the late Bishop of London's Commissaries did, " *or such as it might be thought proper that any future* " *Commissaries should,* if this design were not to take " place." The latter words are marked with Italics by Dr. Furneaux; the former by me; for if the

Juris-

These intolerant principles, common to almost all denominations of Christians, were encouraged by the unhappy civil dissensions, with which in this country they were connected. Popery may be considered, from the Reformation to the times within our own memory, as a most determined and dangerous enemy, not of our Church only, but of our State, of all our civil rights and liberties; nothing was too sanguinary, nothing was too inhuman, for her to attempt for the sake of recovering her lost authority. And it is well known what part religious discord among Protestants had in the troubles of the last century; and that the contest, which this had fomented, ended in the

Jurisdiction given be *over the Clergy of the Church of England in those parts* and none other, all reasonable pretence of suspicion seems to me to fall to the ground.

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subversion of our civil and ecclesiastical Constitution, and produced all the calamities and injustice, which parties inflamed with religious zeal, and irritated by mutual injuries, inflict, when they have power, on each other. After such convulsions of government, where religion and politics have been so much blended, it is not easy soon to consider them apart; to distinguish between religious and political principles; and to determine what degree of restraint is to be laid on those, whose principles are adverse to the State: What the suffering party will be very apt to think oppressive and vindictive, the others will represent as meant only for public security and peace. And while the memory of such events is recent, and the animosities arising from them subsisting, it is but too probable, that men's passions will always carry them to improper lengths, and make them im-

pose

pose on their adversaries too hard conditions.

But it has been the happiness of our times to be removed far enough from those days of confusion, for us to be exempt from the passions, which in our ancestors were very natural ; and to understand much better than they did the nature both of Civil and Religious Liberty. For the improvements of liberty in both kinds have gone on together, as from their connection might reasonably have been expected ; the subject has been discussed in all its parts by the ablest hands ; and the justice and utility of Toleration is now as much acknowledged by all reasonable well-informed men, as any maxim respecting Public Religion and Civil Government. The chief causes also of political disagreement between the Dissenters and ourselves have long ceased ; from the

Revolution we have been all embarked on
 the same bottom of the Settlement then
 made; and they have had the merit of
 being, both from principle and interest,
 constant Friends to it, and to the Succeſ-
 ſion of the preſent Royal Family. We
 have from that time conſidered their in-
 terests as united with our own in the cauſe
 of Civil Liberty, which has for its foun-
 dation that Settlement and Succeſſion;
 and it much concerns both us and them
 not to be perſuaded by any unjuſt ſuſpi-
 cions, or party violence, that we are not
 ſtill Friends, and our great intereſts ſtill
 the ſame. Our Anceſtors of the laſt cen-
 tury might be in ſome meaſure excuſeable,
 if they were intolerant, from want of
 ſufficient knowledge of the ſubject, and
 from the natural workings of human paſ-
 ſions. But our paſſions have not been irri-
 tated; we have had all poſſible informa-
 tion; it may be expected therefore, that

we should act conformably to reason and to justice.

It will I presume appear, that we have so acted ; and that the Toleration enjoyed by the Dissenters from our Established Church has been perhaps more complete, than has been enjoyed in any other country by those under the same predicament ; complete I mean in Fact, though not hitherto complete by Law. For when public affairs appear to have been well settled, and have gone on in a course of permanent tranquillity, there is always a reluctance (sometimes too great) in making any alteration in them. Men do not always distinguish, and often it is not easy to distinguish, the good and beneficial parts of such regulations from those, which are unnecessary, and grown perhaps inexpedient ; they know, that the whole taken together was productive of
good

good, and are therefore afraid of touching any part of it. Alterations in laws never keep pace with the change of circumstances, which are continually fluctuating; the inconvenience must be very apparent, and grow pressing, before they can be obtained; in most cases a change of opinions and manners must long beforehand gradually prepare the way for them.

In conformity to the settlement of our Civil Liberties, Toleration was granted to the Dissenters; nothing could be more reasonable and more just. It was granted on terms, which I apprehend were then satisfactory to all parties; ease of conscience was sufficiently consulted, the peace of government sufficiently secured*. Since that

* The Dissenters dwell with pleasure on an expression of one or two great men, who have said, that

that time, the religious opinions of the Dissenters themselves have changed, they now cannot or do not chuse to subscribe to those opinions, which their Ancestors held, and to which they did not object to subscribe as a condition of their Toleration. What has been the consequence? The condition has never been exacted; and they have enjoyed the benefits of the Toleration-Act to this day as fully, as if it had not made part of it. For I believe hardly a single instance could be produced, when such instances were diligently enquired after, of a Dissenter's having suffered for not complying with this condition of the Law. A singular

by the Toleration-Act their Public Worship was *established*. It had certainly every degree of Legality given to it, under the conditions prescribed, by whatever name that is expressed; which is of very little consequence. See Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, p. 23, 24, 2d edit.

proof this of the tolerant disposition both of our Civil and Ecclesiastical Governors.

However, the Dissenters wished to be exempted from this condition by Law, from which they had been before exempted only by Connivance; and a few years ago applied twice to Parliament for this purpose, in both which applications they were unsuccessful. I confess, my Lord, at the time I much wished, that these applications had been complied with. Permit me to say, with all deference to our Legislature, which was of a different opinion, that they seemed to ask only what was reasonable, what was consistent with the general principles of Toleration; that it could do no harm to allow them that by Law, which they had long enjoyed in Fact, and of which in future nobody ever thought of depriving them. Perhaps the fate of those petitions

tions did not wholly depend on their own merits, but on some circumstances of the times, which had an unfavourable influence on them. If such an application be again made, I cannot help expressing my hopes, that it will meet with a more favourable reception : this only is wanting to render the Toleration of this country with respect to the Dissenters complete.

For although by the Corporation and Test Acts they lie under some disadvantages, I do not conceive they suffer any injury. I profess, I do not understand any general indefinite claim of all men indiscriminately to the Civil Offices of their country ; or that the State may not exercise her discretion concerning the persons, to whom she may chuse to delegate any part of her authority. In fact, this is done with respect to all Offices ; certain qualifications are required, which

exclude those who have them not. There certainly is a considerable connection between a Civil Government and an Established Church ; they have a mutual influence, and the form of one ought to be, and generally is, adapted to the other. Hence we see, that among Protestants in Monarchical countries, the Form of the Church has been for the most part Episcopal ; in Republics, that has been also Republican. Church Government will have a relation to political principles ; it is unnecessary to say, that it has had in our own country. The Constitution of our Church is analogous, is adapted to our Civil Constitution ; the principles of the Dissenters concerning Church Government are ill adapted, are unfavourable to some parts of it. Without recurring invidiously to past transactions, though there are among the Dissenters numbers of able and honest men, who

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would

would discharge any office which should be committed to them most unexceptionably, yet the general operation of those principles, when carried to the degree, to which even now we see them carried, is not favourable to the whole of our present Constitution in Church and State, which are not without reason considered as connected in their interests. To exempt men from penalties, which they do not deserve, is one thing; to delegate to them authority is another; the first is a matter of justice, the latter of favour and discretion; which the State may surely refuse to do, if such authority be likely to operate to her own prejudice. Of this the State must judge, and act accordingly*.

* I confess, neither the Author of *the Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity*, or his *Catechumens*, if they agree with their Teacher in all his opinions, appear to me proper persons to exercise Civil Authority under our Present Constitution.

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The Dissenters, by being incapable of Civil Offices, lie undoubtedly under a Disadvantage; a disadvantage perhaps as little felt in this country as possible, where Industry is branched out into so many forms, and offers such a choice of useful and reputable employments. But it does not seem, that they can more justly complain of an Injury, than all those persons who are disqualified, for want of sufficient property, from executing different Civil Offices, in almost all of which in proportion to their rank a certain amount of it is required; than those, for instance, who are excluded on this account from the House of Commons. Numbers of persons under this incapacity would no doubt make excellent Members of Parliament; and it is not more their fault not to be worth 300l. a year, than it is the Dissenters' fault to hold religious opinions inconsistent with those of the Established Church.

If certain persons are unfit to execute Civil Offices, this unfitness, whatever may be the cause of it, whether poverty, opinion, or any other circumstance attending them, is a sufficient ground of their exclusion. Bad effects, produced by religious opinions, are not less to be prevented, than other effects equally bad arising from other causes.

Our Ancestors, my Lord, had the merit of granting Toleration to Protestant Dissenters; but the public dangers from Popery were then, and continued long after, too alarming, to admit of the Papists being comprehended in a plan of religious pacification, and of those Laws being repealed, the rigour of which could only be justified by extreme necessity. Time and a change of circumstances seem to have in some measure dispelled these dangers; we have now little to apprehend

hend from the attempts of that Religion against the State. It is a fortunate circumstance of our days, that in them a considerable body of our Countrymen, who were before considered by the Laws as enemies to our Religion and Government, and treated as such, have obtained the confidence of the Legislature so far, as to be relieved from some of the hardships under which they laboured, and to be in part admitted to us as Fellow-Citizens and Friends.

For however popular it may be in this country to hold up Popery, as an object of abhorrence, it surely is not reasonable to suppose, that it can never be entitled to any degree of Toleration. It may be thought, as a matter of speculation only, that, provided the professors of it no longer breathe the same spirit of independence and hostility, provided by their
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solemn declarations and conduct they give us assurance of their being good subjects, Reliques and Images and Transubstantiation have little to do with the State; that men's follies and absurdities, if they are harmless to others, are not proper objects of legal restraint; and that it is having a very contracted notion of Toleration itself, to extend it in the amplest form to one set of men, and to withhold it entirely from another, supposing that both might partake of it consistently with public security. It might be thought, that Popery might live as amicably with Protestantism in this country, as it does in many parts of Germany and in Holland.

But although all this may be true in Speculation, the Practical Statesman must take in other considerations. The reason of the thing is not always enough

for him to act upon. Before such alterations are made, opinions and prejudices must be consulted; which last are abated only by time and experience. We may see how ready people are to take the alarm in such matters by what has passed in Scotland on this very subject; the last century could hardly have produced any thing more violent. Without proceeding further, it may be prudent and necessary to wait and see the effect of a partial relief, both on the opinions of the people at large and the conduct of the party relieved; for it certainly requires some experience to be perfectly assured, that Popery will not make an ill use of any liberty which should be granted to her, considering her old restless spirit, and the indefatigable zeal she has always shewn for making profelytes.

The Penal Laws against Popery, which disgrace our Statute-book, have indeed been rendered almost harmless by the humane and tolerant spirit of this country. The most severe and oppressive have been suffered to lie dormant and to grow obsolete ; they have hardly ever been called forth of late years, except now and then to satisfy the mean and vindictive purposes of private malice ; and the Magistrate either finds some evasion not to execute them at all, or does it with reluctance. Unreasonable Laws, where the punishment is out of all proportion to the offence, for the most part, in free countries especially, defeat themselves ; the general good sense and humanity of a people are revolted at them, and by preventing their effects almost repeal them.

There cannot be a stronger evidence of the humane and tolerating spirit of the

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nation, than this connivance in the case both of the Papists and Dissenters, which has in a great measure supplied the imperfection of our laws; and of this spirit I believe the Clergy partake in as large a proportion as any class of men in the community. Our Predecessors in the Church may many of them, have had their full share of the intolerant character of former times; but if there be a feature in the character of the present Clergy peculiarly distinguishing, it is that of good temper and moderation towards other sects of Christians; which dispositions have grown more general among them, and been continually extending themselves even to the present times.

Amidst the illustrious patrons of Religious Liberty, some of the most eminent have arisen from the bosom of our Church; to name no more than Bishop Taylor of

the last century, and Bishop Hoadly of the present. The cause of Toleration in favour of those, who dissent from us and disapprove of our Establishment, has never been pleaded more earnestly or more ably, than by some of the Ministers of the Establishment itself.

And at this time, if we are to judge from all appearances, what can be more reasonable and moderate than the dispositions of the Clergy towards our Dissenting Brethren? Can an instance be produced of the Bishops who opposed their late applications to Parliament, ever exerting any act of authority to distress them? Has the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in the hands of any subordinate Officer ever been employed for this purpose? Do the Clergy in their Sermons treat the Dissenters with want of charity and candour; or endeavour to inspire their congregations

with bitterness or dislike to them? Are their Writings from the press composed with a spirit of bigotry and party, and filled with satire and invective? I profess, I know of no Plan of Lectures on Conformity, which can be produced as a counter-part to that, which we have seen on Non-conformity.

May this moderation, my Lord, always be the distinguishing character of the Clergy of the Church of England; it is a character the most conformable to the spirit of their Religion; it will do them the greatest honour with all wise men, with all true friends of universal Christianity. May this moderation continue to influence every part both of their public and private conduct. Men may be good Christians in other Churches as well as in our own; but if we are studious to make Profelytes that are worth having,
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this moderation is an argument of the most conciliating kind; it is even alarming to those, who in this respect are our competitors. It is found necessary on this very account to put the Dissenters on their guard against us; we are become dangerous to them from our mildness *. Nothing, my Lord, which I can add, will be paying so high a compliment to our Church.

* See Plan of Lectures, Preface, p. 4.

LETTER IV.

On the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction.

IN Societies, my Lord, which are numerous, whether Civil or Religious, many Regulations are necessary, many persons in Office to see that they are observed; without them neither the Form or Spirit of such Societies can subsist; their parts will fall into confusion, the purposes designed by them will not be answered.

It is not my intention to enter into any of the arguments, deduced from Scripture on the Form of Church-Government, which were debated with such violence in the last age. To whatever opinion
different

different parties may be inclined on these arguments, it seems pretty apparent, that neither Christ or his Apostles meant to prescribe minutely those regulations, by which the future Church should be governed in the several countries where it was to subsist. What we meet with in Scripture are intimations and examples of their practice concerning this Government rather than direct commands; we do not see the form of it delineated at full length, and accurately expressed in all its parts, as the System of the Jewish Church was by Moses in his Law, but only some general Out-lines of it: the Divine Wisdom probably making this difference between a Religion, which was appropriated to a certain People, to a certain Country, to a certain Temple, and that, which was to be diffused over the face of the earth, and to take in the various nations of it,

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with all their differences of climate and manners.

Many things in the regulation of Christian Churches are certainly left at large to be provided for by Human Wisdom; and I have therefore always considered the Government of Civil and Religious Societies as much on the same footing; and reducible, wherever the express divine direction is not apparent, to the same principles. For God designed Man both for Society and Religion; they are both of them equally of his appointment. It is as much his will, that those Civil Laws be obeyed, by which our Lives and Properties are secured; as it is, that we should believe those Truths and observe those Precepts, which more immediately constitute our Religious Duty. But the particular means, by which these

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purposes

purposes are to be obtained, the particular regulations, which will best produce them, are left in both cases to be determined by Human Wisdom, and to be accommodated to the different circumstances of the Societies, for which they are wanted. Men lie under the same obligation to preserve the purity and influence of Religion in making Ecclesiastical Regulations; as they do to consult the Social Happiness of Mankind in making Civil Laws.

Without recurring to divine right, nothing surely is a more natural mode of governing the numerous Body of Clergy belonging to a considerable nation, than to appoint single Men, with subordinate Officers, out of their own number to preside over them in different districts; that is, to govern them by Bishops. I do not see the impropriety of this mode
of

of governing in any country; but if it be thought, that there should be a sort of analogy in all countries between the Ecclesiastical and Civil Constitution, I should say, that in our own the Episcopal Form was more proper than any other for the Government of the Church, from its being most analagous to that of the State.

To this Form of Church-Government a Jurisdiction is annexed; Courts of Judicature are held, and justice administered on certain matters, cognisable in these Courts by the Laws of the Land. We shall best judge of the present merits or demerits of this Jurisdiction with respect to the Nation at large, of its proper limits and extent, by considering the Authority from whence it is derived, and its Operation as it is now administered.

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There is no person at all conversant in our History, who does not well remember the perpetual disputes and violent convulsions, occasioned in the earlier periods of it by the adherence of the Clergy to their Roman Law; by their claims of exemption from all Civil Judicature; and by their daring incroachments on the power of the State. Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction was then indeed hostile and formidable; and it required all the policy and firmness of our ablest Princes to withstand and to repress it. The memory of this may still prejudice us against all Ecclesiastical Authority; we may perhaps consider the Old Papal Jurisdiction as the parent of the Present; though the descent has gone through so many generations, and through such a change of fortunes, that hardly a feature of it remains the same.

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For when our Church was once united with our Civil Government, the whole Authority of both from that time flowed from the same source; there were no longer subsisting in the same country two inconsistent Powers; that of the Church became (as it ought to be) subordinate and dependent. But for many years after our separation from the See of Rome, neither did our Civil or Ecclesiastical Authority wear that mild and humane aspect, which we now see in it; the Church was indeed no longer an enemy to the State; but when the State was arbitrary, it was no wonder, if the Church supported by it was oppressive; they advanced gradually and hand in hand (as was to be expected) to that happy temper, by which they are at this time both distinguished.

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The Ecclesiastical Law of this Country is now, not the Pope's, but the *King's; it makes part of the General Law of the Land, and is derived from the same Authority; the Courts, where it is administered, are subordinate, and controulable by the Civil Courts, if ever they exceed the limits prescribed to them. In this respect therefore the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction stands clear of all exception.

The matters, which by the laws of our country are the Objects of this Jurisdiction, are some of them ecclesiastical, as the Rights and Discipline of the Church; some of a mixed nature, as Cases of Marriage; and others purely civil, as Wills and Administrations. The first are the natural and proper objects of it. Mar-

* Blackstone's Introd. Sect. 3.

riage, being with us not a mere Civil, but partly a Religious Contract, may not unnaturally fall under the same cognifance. But there can be no reason, from the nature of the thing, why Testamentary Business should be tranfacted, or the difputes relating to it decided, in thefe Courts; and that it has been fo, has only arifen from the affumed power of the Church of Rome over the difpofition of Private Property, by which the Mode of Difpofing became then cognifable by Ecclefiaftical Authority; and from the permiffion of the General Law of the Land, that this business should continue to flow in the fame channel.

But however foreign part of our Ecclefiaftical Jurifdiction may be to Religion, either public or private, it is a matter in itfelf of no great importance. The principles, on which fuch business is

transacted, and causes decided, are equally certain with those of the Common Law-Courts, some of which have a concurrent jurisdiction in these cases; they are equally consonant to the General Law of the Land; and the persons presiding are often the same with those who are intrusted with Civil Authority. The Judge, who presides in a Consistory Court as Chancellor, or his Surrogate, often executes, and is generally from his situation qualified to execute, the powers of the Municipal Law, as a Justice of Peace. The decisions then of these Courts are authorised by the General Law of the Land; and the Ecclesiastical Magistrates are of the same class and rank of men, to whom that Law often delegates some of her own merely Civil Power. The Clergy of England are considered by her, and justly, as equally Citizens with all the rest of her people, and as equally fit

to be trusted with a degree of Civil Authority proportioned to their rank in the community ; to which indeed they are attached by every tie, that can make men interested in its welfare.

If those matters, which are certainly not the natural and proper objects of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction were removed from it to that of our Common Law-Courts, I confess I should have seen no material objection to it, (except the transferring of certain Fees from one set of Officers to another should be thought such) had not a much better * judge than myself been of a different opinion.

“ It must be acknowledged (says he) to
 “ the honour of the Spiritual Courts,
 “ that though they continue to this day
 “ to decide many questions, which are

* Blackstone, B. iii. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. P. 98.

“ properly of temporal cognifance ; yet
 “ juftice is in general fo ably and impar-
 “ tially adminiftered in thofe tribunals,
 “ (efpecially of the fuperior kind) and the
 “ boundaries of their power are now fo
 “ well known and eftablifhed, that no
 “ material inconvenience at prefent arifes
 “ from this jurifdiction ftill continuing
 “ in the antient channel. And, fhould
 “ an alteration be attempted, great con-
 “ fufion would probably arife, in over-
 “ turning long-eftablifhed forms, and
 “ new-modelling a courfe of proceed-
 “ ings that has now prevailed for feven
 “ centuries.”

The Forms indeed of thefe Courts are
 on the Roman plan, and confequently
 different from thofe of the Common
 Law ; but there are other Courts befide
 the Ecclefiaftical, which proceed accord-

ing to the same forms, especially the Court of Chancery. We need not hesitate in giving a preference to the mode of Legal Proceeding delivered down to us by our own Ancestors ; but if any inconveniences be supposed to arise from the other mode, these are not peculiar to the Ecclesiastical Courts, but operate also elsewhere in cases much more important,

Excommunication, my Lord, is unfortunately the instrument, by which the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction is to assert its authority. I have no scruple in saying, that the instrument is improper and bad. As such I believe every Ecclesiastical Judge uses it most sparingly, and never employs it without necessity; but as no Jurisdiction can subsist, where an obstinate Party may set it at defiance with impunity,

impunity, the necessity will sometimes occur, when it must be employed; if submission can be obtained by no other methods, it must be obtained by that, which the Court is impowered to use in the last resort. Beside the spiritual part of Excommunication, a part which never should have been applied to these purposes, many civil disabilities, and those of the most serious kind, are immediately incurred by it; * and ‘ at the end of forty days, ‘ if the offender does not submit to the ‘ sentence of the Court, the Bishop may ‘ certify such contempt to the King in ‘ Chancery, from whence the Writ *de* ‘ *excommunicato capiendo* is issued to the ‘ Sheriff of the County; who shall there- ‘ upon take up the Offender, and imprison ‘ him in the County Goal, till he is re- ‘ conciled to the Church, and such recon-

* Blackstone B. 3. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. p. 102.

‘ ciliation certified to the Bishop.’ I have often wished, my Lord, that the Law in this respect was altered ; that the effect, or part of the effect of Excommunication might be obtained, as it might easily be, without the previous and unbecoming formality of spiritual censures. Supposing an Ecclesiastical Judge were empowered in cases of contempt, where he must now excommunicate, after forty days to require by a proper instrument the imprisonment of the party in contempt, from the Sheriff or a Justice of Peace, on the same conditions of delivery, when his submission is certified ; a part only of the consequences of Excommunication would be incurred, but a part sufficient to secure obedience to the Court ; the remedy would be had more easily, and less reluctantly employed ; the offensive use of spiritual censures would be avoided ; and the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction would owe its support, just

as much as it does now, to the intervention of the Civil Power *.

Ecclesiastical Rights and Discipline seem the natural and proper objects of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction. The Laity are concerned indeed in many of the first; but the decisions in these cases are the decisions of the Law of the Land, and some of the temporal Courts have a concurrent Jurisdiction, so that parties may make their choice; to these indeed almost all matters of consequence are at this time carried of course. The Laity have little

* Since I wrote this, I find, that a proposal of the same kind was agreed on in Convocation 1714, and intended to be offered to Parliament, that it might pass into a law. Wilkins's Conc. Vol. iv. p. 654. This design dropped on Queen Anne's death, which happened soon after. Such a proposal had before been mentioned in Convocation 1580. *ibid.* p. 300.

now to apprehend from Church-Authority, except the presentment of a Country Church Warden for any irregularities of life be esteemed formidable. Canons framed by a Convocation have been declared by the greatest * Lawyer of his age not binding on the Laity; and justly declared so, because not issuing from the Legislature, to which they are subject; and the Ecclesiastical Courts, if they seem ever so little to exceed their due bounds, are immediately corrected by the Courts of Common Law,

I am persuaded, that no reasonable man among the Clergy would wish to carry Church-Power over the Laity a step beyond where it is at present fixed; but in what relates to the internal regula-

* Lord Hardwicke—see Burn's Preface to Eccl. Law.

tion and discipline of the Clergy themselves, and the due performance of Ecclesiastical Duties, the case is very different. Let the Power of the Church over others be little, or none at all; but let her have enough to controul and govern her own immediate subjects; to make *them* do their duty, and to correct *their* delinquencies. In doing this, let her not be checked at every step by the interposition of the Common Law Courts, which in these cases seem to use rather more than * “ a parental authority;” let not every slight occasion be embraced of transferring the matter in question to another judicature. It surely is not consulting the interest of the Public at large to weaken the hands of the Officers of the Clergy with respect to their own body; to throw embarrassments and difficulties in their

* See Black. B. iii. Ch. 7. Vol. iii. p. 103.

way, when they would prevent or correct abuses, of which the Laity are naturally enough very ready to complain, but of which perhaps the weakness of Church-Authority in the hands of its Governors is the cause.

The Residence of the Clergy, for instance, is undoubtedly good as a general principle; but is subject from the nature of it to a variety of exceptions, which can never be all provided for by any written Law, and which should be left to the discretion of some superior. The Bishop is certainly the person, who is the proper judge of them; and we may I think presume, that few men in that station would be so unreasonable as to insist on it indiscriminately, without any consideration of circumstances, in all cases. As the matter now stands, a Bishop would find it for the most part a very difficult,

if not an impracticable, attempt to compel by course of Law a Clergyman to reside on his Benefice. To expect, that the subordination of the Clergy should be as strict as that of the Army, would be putting perhaps too strong a case. But what should we say of an Army, where the Commanding Officer had not power to make a Subaltern join his regiment*?

The Bounds of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction have indeed been contracted on all occasions; hardly any opportunity of doing it has been omitted. That it is

* Next to the Clergy themselves, it might be thought, that there could not well be a more proper subject for Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction than a Parish-Clerk; but the doctrine of Westminster-Hall seems to be, that he is a Temporal Officer, and consequently not amenable to it. Burn's Eccl. Law. Title Parish-Clerk. Pitt and Evans. Parker and Clerke. Peak and Bourne.

stripped

stripped of its old usurpations is happy for us all; that it is no longer what it once was, formidable to the State and independent of it; incompatible with the national welfare, and oppressive to individuals. It is happy for us, that it is not now, what it was for many reigns even of our Protestant Princes after the Reformation, a partaker with them of power too ill-defined, too roughly exercised to be consistent with public Liberty. But we may possibly have fallen into the opposite extreme; and by lowering it too much may have rendered it weak and ineffective with respect to that, which is its proper province. It must be confessed, that it came from a suspicious parentage; it is no wonder, that after so many generations some may still look on it with a jealous eye, and hardly yet think themselves safe from it; though at this time we might almost as well, from the same
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resemblance of features, be afraid of the Court of Chancery.

While the Ecclesiastical Judicature decides well and agreeably to our General Law on those civil matters, which are still committed to it, it is a thing of great indifference from what species of Court these decisions issue. With respect to any Censorial Power over the Laity, what remains to this Jurisdiction is trifling, I had almost said contemptible; and it would perhaps be as well, if even that remnant were taken away. But when we were getting rid of the superfluous and offensive parts of Ecclesiastical Authority, we seem to have gone too far, to have cut away without distinction, and not to have been satisfied with reducing its growth, till we left it without vigour sufficient for the internal government of our Church.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R V.

On the Provision of the Clergy.

IN every country, my Lord, the Provision for any Class of men in it must depend on the rank that Class holds in the community, on the abilities required from it, and on the industry, riches, knowledge, and manners of the country itself. Where industry is branched out into a variety of employments, which furnish numbers with a comfortable and reputable subsistence; and where from the riches of the nation Merit in every branch of it meets with suitable encouragement; there every Profession must offer to those who engage in it adequate rewards, such as are proportioned to those
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of other professions which are nearly of the same rank. Otherwise, amidst so general a competition, that which is below the market-price will find no customers, and be deserted.

The proficiency of a nation in knowledge and the arts of life, makes the demand for knowledge in almost all professions proportionably greater, multiplies the requisite qualifications, and increases the labour and expence of acquiring them. The manners also of a people very much affect all professions in it ; and regard must be had in them to many things, which at first sight may appear of little or no consequence : it is very certain, that in almost all of them appearances must be to a certain degree consulted, fashion complied with, and a decorum preserved, founded more on opinion than on the nature of

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things

things themselves. These considerations acquire strength, the higher the rank is which any particular profession holds in the community, and the greater the abilities which are required from it.

There never was perhaps a Country, where so wide and inviting a field was laid open for Industry of all kinds as our own; where there was such a choice of ways of life, all of which, if properly pursued, afford a reasonable prospect of convenience and comfort. And as this is a country, where riches (and great part of them of the most valuable kind, riches acquired by industry) abound and are diffused throughout the people, Merit of every kind bears here a higher price than elsewhere, and every owner has reason to expect he should be better paid for his abilities.

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We need not I believe fear incurring the imputation of partiality, by supposing this nation as far advanced in all kinds of useful knowledge, possessed in as high a degree of all those improvements, which enlarge the human mind, and produce convenience and elegance of life, as any which ever yet existed. The eighteenth Century will probably always be considered as a period, when knowledge and arts abounded and flourished; and wherever the improvements of that period are recorded, our own Country will I am persuaded hold there a distinguished place: But in such a country the individuals of different professions must keep pace with the state of general improvement; ignorance in any of them becomes more disgraceful; the public, to whom professions are accountable, will less bear with it.

The advancement indeed of our knowledge, the variety and perfection of our arts, the extent of our commerce, and the multiplicity of our connections render Government in every part of it, whether foreign or domestic, complicated and difficult. Government is most immediately affected by these causes; but they operate also in some degree on all the higher professions of our country.

All the foregoing circumstances concur in forming our national Manners. Industry, Riches, Arts, and Knowledge, wherever they flourish, as they do here, civilise men; give them social virtues, and qualities, which make life convenient and agreeable. But as all human advantages are attended with their respective evils, they civilise men to excess, and make them pay too much regard (for some regard is due) to the distinctions in Society,

Society, which they naturally create. Family and Wealth command amongst us a degree of respect; the owners of them are entitled to it, so long as they do not disgrace their pre-eminence by unworthy conduct. From thus naturally connecting respect with these advantages of fortune, we almost appropriate it to these only; we connect them so much together, that we cannot consider them enough apart to bestow respect, where we see a total want of worldly advantages. In any station to which respect is due, the purest virtue and the best abilities will not command it from the vulgar, if it be accompanied by what they have been taught to think mean; if it want that external decency of appearance, which they expect from it.

I shall now, my Lord, apply the observations I have been making to the

Provision assigned by the Law to our Clergy, and offer such considerations as shall occur concerning it, and which appear to me to have some weight in determining on its general propriety; whether it be sufficient for the purposes designed, or too little or too much; whether it be well distributed; whether the nature of the property be convenient; and on the whole, whether it be consistent with sound Policy and public Welfare. But I must premise, that my reasonings will only apply to those readers, who think it of importance to the public and private happiness of mankind, to their present and their future existence, that the Belief and Influence of the Christian Religion should be preserved; and who consequently think it necessary, that an Order of men should be set apart to teach and to administer it, without which its Belief and Influence cannot be preserved;

to those, who will allow, that the Public Profession of Christianity should be supported by Civil Government, and a suitable Provision for its Ministers assigned by it.

It is not less necessary, that this Provision should be adapted to the circumstances of our Country and Manners, than that of any other class of men in the community. Their Qualifications must bear a proportion to the general state of Knowledge and Improvement; their expence in acquiring these qualifications will also be increased in proportion to the Riches of the country and the expence of living in it; they will be invited by the advantages of other professions, before they engage in that of the Church; when they have engaged in it, their way of living and external appearance must be regulated by present manners, and the provision for their families by the present measures of education and subsistence.

The higher ranks in this country consist for the most part of persons of improved understanding ; a general degree of knowledge is diffused also throughout the whole mass of the people ; the Preacher, who is to address them, should certainly be himself competently furnished with it, in order to acquit himself with satisfaction to them, or with any degree of reputation to himself. Mere Knowledge, a fund of proper topics for religious instruction, is not only requisite, but good Judgement also in selecting, and applying them, together with something conciliating in the manner of their being conveyed. Men of good sense are disgusted and disappointed at hearing Religion supported by futile, insufficient, and injudicious arguments, which are apt to have an unfavourable effect on their general belief of it. And to all hearers such instruction comes recommended by being agreeably conveyed, by

having a reasonable degree of attention paid to the manner, in which it is both composed and delivered.

If it be thought, that all this is not wanted to satisfy the Country-Congregation of a small village; there are cases, where it is wanted in a much higher degree. In this land of liberty Religion is attacked with as little reserve as it is defended; the wit and the acuteness of Infidelity are employed against it without mercy. That this should be the case, I do not think just matter of complaint; but it is fit, that the defence should be managed as ably as the attack; that the Body of the Clergy, the natural defenders of Religion, should always afford men qualified for this service, and at least equal to their adversaries. It is their business, and a business which requires the best abilities and most extensive knowledge,

ledge, to rescue the truths both of Natural and Revealed Religion from the sophistry, misrepresentation, and ridicule, with which they are often treated ; and to establish them on the firm foundations of reason and good sense. There is a connection between all parts of knowledge ; they give mutual assistance to each other ; for a Clergyman to be possessed of that, which is merely professional, is not enough to make him an able defender of Religion.

It is well known, that the Education preparatory to the Clerical Profession is attended with a very considerable expence from the earlier parts of life ; an expence nearly the same with that, which is necessary for the other Liberal Professions ; and which has for some years increased together with the increasing riches of our country.

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The Emoluments then of the Clergy should bear a due proportion to those of other professions, that require nearly the same abilities, are attended with the same expence, and hold the same rank in the community. As it is, amidst the numbers of which this Order consists, there are always in it many men of the first abilities; the greater part from decent and reputable, many from the most considerable families in this country. Should there be a great and evident disparity to the disadvantage of this profession compared with those others, can it be expected, that men, who might form reasonable prospects of success in any other profession from their abilities or connections, will engage in this? The profession must itself be lowered; it must be deserted by those, who are best qualified by their abilities for the first stations of it; and by those, whose personal rank and connections

connections would tend to give it consideration and respect.

The better parts, for instance, of the Law and the Church are made out of the same materials, are composed of men of nearly the same rank, fortune, and education. Is it improper, that a Clergyman of merit in his profession should acquire in it what he might probably have himself acquired at the Bar ; and what others in most respects his equals do acquire there ? Have they not the same claim to success in their different ways ? Should success be thought reputable in one case, and invidious in the other ? Is it less proper, that he, who set out a private Clergyman, should become a Bishop, and have a seat in the House of Peers ; than that he, who set out a private Barrister, should be an Attorney or Solicitor General, a Judge, or a Lord Chancellor ?

‘ But

‘ But such success in the Law is a more
 ‘ certain proof of great professional merit,
 ‘ than in the Church.’ It is admitted.

I do not mean to complain of want of rewards in the Church, or of the greatness of them in the Law. I know no character, which deserves more from this country, than that of an able, learned, and upright Legal Magistrate; all honours, all wealth are well bestowed on him; but they far exceed, as perhaps they ought to do, those of the Clerical Profession.

There has been no source both of Nobility and Riches more fruitful, or indeed more truly honourable, than that of the first offices in the Law; the Church also has her Honours and her Wealth. These Honours make part of our Civil Constitution; they are not transmissible to families; why, under this restriction, they are improper,

proper, as the Rewards of a Profession, I confess I cannot discover. As to Ecclesiastical Wealth, where shall we find the families, that are built on it? Where shall we trace up Modern Riches to an Ecclesiastical, as we continually do to a Legal Ancestor? The Wealth of the Church can in these days be very rarely accumulated to any amount; and if it be thus accumulated, it is not absorbed by her, but flows back again into the society at large.

Take away the rewards of this profession, and men of good prospects will betake themselves to other paths of life; they will be determined by the same motives in the destination of their Children. It is a subject, in which prudential considerations must have their due weight; those professions, which are most reputable and promising, will of course be most pursued;

fued; no one profession has a right to claim a preference with respect to the virtue of its members, when in all of them, by acting well, men may be equally good, may alike do their duty to God and to their Country.

But dropping the consideration of what may be called the prizes of the Clerical Profession, it ought to afford to all its members a Subsistence adapted to the rank they hold, to the office they discharge in the community. They must if possible maintain an appearance, which will procure them some respect from the bulk of the people, who are governed by appearance; whatever looks like meanness, whatever exposes them to contempt will not only lower the personal regard paid to them, but will hurt their ministerial character, will in some measure disqualify them from acting with effect in it.

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For in our present state of manners it is in vain to expect, that the people should ever treat Poverty, however respectable in itself, with respect; it depreciates in their eyes every other quality.

The Profession therefore should afford all its members a reasonable prospect of such a subsistence, as will support the rank they hold, and the appearance in the world that is expected from them; and this must be estimated from our present habits, from our present modes of thinking; what would provide decently for a Clergyman in Switzerland, or in the remotest parts of our own Island, is not a measure applicable to the greater part of the English Clergy.

Their income is from the nature of it more known than that of other professions; it is expected, that they should live
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in a way proportioned to it; and even those, whose income is more affluent, have it on this account less in their power to make considerable savings, than men in most other situations of life.

Upon the whole; a probable judgement may I think be formed, whether the general Provision for the Clergy be more than sufficient for their reasonable demands, from the following considerations. Are they in general able to improve the fortunes of their families? To leave their Children in a better situation, than they were in at the same age themselves? To qualify them for employments of a superior rank and of higher pretensions, than their own? It seems to me clearly, that they are not able; and therefore, if their character be not extravagance, for which as a general charge I know no reason, their Provision is not more than sufficient;

it only leaves their families, where it found them.

That there should be a difference of rank and income among the Clergy seems as proper, as in almost all other ways of life, where the same difference generally obtains. To rise from lower degrees in a profession to higher, either from merit or long standing in it, is the natural progress of human life. It is necessary for the purposes of government and subordination; it is proper, as a spur to emulation, an encouragement to merit, and a reward of long services. The inequality however may be greater than these purposes require, and it may not always operate in such a manner as to encourage merit, and to reward long services.

It is certain, that interest and connections will have their weight in the distribution

bution of Church-preferments. Success in the Law is, as I before observed, a more certain proof of professional merit. It may sometimes happen in the Church, that great advantages may be obtained, where there is little or no merit; it may also happen, that the most deserving may be left in obscurity and neglect. The more common case is, that great Ecclesiastical Advancement is the joint effect of both interest and merit; yet there are numberless instances, where the latter alone and unassisted procures what is comfortable and affluent; some, where it attains the highest dignities of the Church.

It is fit, that the revenue of its Governors should be ample; equal to the rank assigned them in our country; neither is there any reason, as I said before, why the rest of the Clergy should all be on a level: but the disproportion seems in

many instances too great. All should have what is sufficient for a decent Subsistence; without it men are cramped, discouraged, and in some measure disqualified for the duties of their office. None should have from the Church (for of men's private fortunes I am not speaking) such an excess, as leads rather to luxury and dissipation than the regular and serious discharge of their clerical functions, and makes the comparative situation of others humiliating and unpleasant. In many instances accidental causes have contributed to a disproportion between the income of preferments and the duties attending them. A change of circumstances has often taken place, since that distribution of Church-revenues was made, which still subsists. Villages, which were inconsiderable, are become populous; Towns have arisen on spots, which were not inhabited; and those

places are not uncommonly the worst provided for by legal rights, where the Parochial duties are the most laborious.

But this inequality of the conditions of the Clergy will not be thought so great, as at first sight it may appear, if we attend to one consideration. Competence is a relative thing; and is measured by that, which the education, habits, and connections of each individual have taught him to expect, and have made in some degree necessary to him. The numerous body of our Clergy is composed of a great variety of materials; if the bulk of it be produced from the middle ranks of life, those nearly on a footing with itself, yet the most considerable families in this country contribute likewise their part, and there is a large portion, whose origin is far below it. The younger Son of a Nobleman or Gentleman of property

is not *for him* perhaps better provided for by what is thought great Preferment, than the Son of a Mechanic, whose Father was just able to get him into the Profession, is by a scanty and obscure Country Living: the natural wants and expectations of both, at their setting out in life, may perhaps be equally answered; both may have what is to them competence in the same degree. And those, whose origin is low, whose connections are mean, are the persons, that will of course most suffer in the unequal distribution of ecclesiastical revenues; the others will be the gainers by it,

The greatest part of the Provision of the Clergy arises from Tithes; a sort of property appropriated to them in this country from high antiquity; and adapted in many respects to an Owner, whose profession it is not to cultivate land, and who

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is only Tenant for Life. It is managed with ease, without the trouble or expence of a continued course of agriculture. It is not liable to the injury, which land will suffer from a careless or distressed predecessor. It is as much a distinct property, as the land from whence it arises; it was neither purchased by the Landlord, nor is it rented of him by the Tenant. Yet this property has also its inconveniences. The interference of it with that of the Occupier of the land is unpleasant, and productive of disputes, to be avoided if possible in all cases, but especially in that of a Clergyman and his Parishioners. Disputes between them lessen or destroy his influence, and in some measure defeat the purposes of his pastoral character. Tithes have been thought not favourable to industry and improvement, in the trouble and expence of which men will not so readily

engage, when another is to share in the advantages. There must be some truth in this, though it does not seem from the state of this country, as if it had produced in any considerable degree this effect.

Where Inclosures are made by Act of Parliament, (a mode of Improvement, by which the national stock of wealth arising from the produce of land is greatly increased) in the new distribution of property, this inconvenience is usually avoided by giving a separate portion of land as an equivalent for Tithes. The Clergyman's property, thrown into this separate form, no longer interferes with that of his Parishioners, and it is liable to no objections as unfavourable to industry; but the general expediency of it may admit of some doubt, as in this form it may become less convenient to the owner, and less adapted to the situation of a Tenant for life.

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The property of Ecclesiastical Bodies consists for the most part of lands granted for Lives or a Term of years. The small Rents Reserved on those estates is an income of the most certain kind, least subject to variation or accident ; and therefore peculiarly fitted to answer the stated demands of such Bodies. Fines on the Renewals of these Grants are of a more contingent kind ; and must be considered as such by those, to whom they belong. This part of the income of the Church has been in general managed with great moderation ; on these renewals much less than the real value, often not more than half of it, has usually been demanded. It is I think much to be wished, that this moderation should always be preserved ; the holders of this kind of property have an equitable claim to it, from its value having been long estimated and the price determined on this presumption. Men
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are also governed in such things more by habit, than by strict notions of right; and pay a larger sum, which they expect to pay, with less reluctance, than a small one which is due by the clearest right, but to the payment of which they have been not accustomed.

Somewhat of the same objection may be made to estates for Lives or Years, which I before mentioned as applicable to Tithes, that they may be in some degree unfavourable to improvement, the advantage of which is not clearly received by the improver, but must in a small part be continually repurchased at successive renewals. And there have been very lately a few instances of a partition of this kind of property by the intervention of the Legislature somewhat similar to that, which has been made in Tithes. An average of all the profits of a Lessor has been computed

puted for a sufficient length of time, and this made an annual charge, as a Fee-farm Rent, on the Estate, which is enfranchised and becomes Freehold to the Lessee; a proper part of this new Rent being reserved in Corn, to guard against the fluctuation of the value of money. The objection on the score of Improvement is taken away; disputes on the terms of Renewal prevented, and the revenue to the Ecclesiastical Owner is rendered certain instead of contingent. These advantages are obvious; but the objection to this mode seems to be, that the Agreement between the Lessor and the Lessee being made once for all on the footing of the present value, the former and his successors will be excluded from all advantages of future improvement.

All such changes of property both with respect to Tithes and Ecclesiastical Leases,
must

must be made on proper terms, adapted to each particular case; for no general proportion can be laid down, which will be applicable either to the one or to the other. To induce an alteration of these kinds of Property on any other plan would occasion great confusion and injustice; considering the length of time they have subsisted in their present form, and how widely they are diffused over the nation. For they are not confined to Ecclesiastical Owners; the Improvements possessed by Laymen, the Grants made by Civil Corporations and private Proprietors, fall under the same description, and are liable to the same objections.

The English Clergy do indeed succeed the Roman Catholic Clergy of this country in part of their possessions, but it is only in part of them; a large portion was at the Reformation and afterwards diverted
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to other purposes, and does not belong to our Present Clergy, who have very different merits with the public. The share of their Predecessors before that time was large out of all proportion; and this will appear in a much stronger light, if we consider, that the whole of the property of the Church bore then a much greater proportion to the national wealth, than the same property would do at present; and must have operated accordingly. At this time, when the Wealth arising from Industry, Arts, and Commerce is so prodigiously increased since the period of which we are speaking, the same quantity of Landed Wealth will no longer have the same influence and effect.

It was perhaps the Master-piece of Roman policy to secure the dependence of her Clergy, by declaring them free from all civil ties, by rendering them incapable

capable of forming natural connections, and thereby detaching them from the countries, to which they belonged. Men, who disclaimed the authority of Civil Judicatures, who had no domestic pledges to bind them to their country, we justly treated with suspicion and diffidence. On this account the Roman Clergy were not properly Citizens; on the contrary, as the situation of the English Clergy is directly opposite in these respects to that of their predecessors, they perhaps have as just pretensions to the character of Good Citizens, as any of their Fellow-Subjects; they are led to be so by every natural and civil interest. They profess by the principles of their Church an entire dependence on Civil Authority; to that they owe the Provision on which they subsist, and the Rank which they hold in the community; and perhaps there is no class of men in our country, whose domestic

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and family connections attach them more to the public welfare of it.

To such a Clergy, my Lord, it is, I should apprehend, consistent with every principle of sound Policy to assign a Provision in all respects suitable to their office and rank; if the Christian Religion be of importance to mankind, if the Public Profession of it be fit to be supported, and a certain Order of men necessary for the administration of it: these things I have taken for granted in this inquiry. There is perhaps room for many improvements in the nature and distribution of this Provision; but there seems little reason to think, that it is on the whole too large, that the prospects of this Profession are too inviting, or that it is set above the level of those others, which are filled by persons of the same original fortune, education, and rank. A Barrister, a Physician,
Gentlemen

Gentlemen of the Army or Navy, a Merchant, with tolerable qualifications and prudent conduct, have all of them a reasonable prospect in this country of obtaining for themselves a decent Subsistence, a competent Provision for their families; any degree of eminence usually gives them Reputation and Affluence; and high Honours with great Wealth are the prizes, which often fall to the share of the most fortunate and most distinguished. With respect to the Clergy, Family-Honours and excessive Wealth are out of the question; but I confess I can see no reason, why an English Clergyman has less pretensions to all other advantages of a liberal profession, than those, who set out with him from the same beginnings in life, but as they advance take other paths in it.

LETTER

L E T T E R VI.

*On the Learning of the Clergy, and the
Freedom of Inquiry.*

GENERAL Learning, my Lord, is in some degree professional to the Clergy; their education usually affords the means of it; and their way of life, removed for the most part from the more active and busy employments of the world, gives them opportunities, which other men have not, of cultivating and extending it. The Learning immediately required of them is certainly that, which has a direct reference to their duties, without which they cannot discharge them ably and effectually. But, as I before observed, almost all kinds of
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knowledge have some connection, and are useful mutually to each other; and if there are parts of it, the utility of which is less apparent, we may at least admit its claim even in these to some regard as a liberal accomplishment.

We must judge from the Writings of our Clergy, on religious subjects, composed either for the Public in general or for the Instruction of their particular congregations, of their merit in that Learning, which immediately belongs to them.

And if there be a sort of Merit, to which the Clergy of England have a more indisputable claim than to any other from the times of the Reformation downwards, it is certainly that of Clerical Learning. I think I may venture to assert, that the Clergy of no country have produced from that period to the present so many able
Writers

Writers on the subject both of Natural and Revealed Religion; that the truths and duties of both have been no where confirmed, explained, and taught with more knowledge, with sounder reasoning, with more good sense; that the attacks made on both have no where been repelled more ably; and the cause of Protestant Christianity against the Church of Rome more successfully defended.

I do not apprehend, that the present Clergy would on inquiry be found in these respects unworthy of their Predecessors. The state of Learning, like that of other human things, is subject to continual change, is affected by the circumstances of times; our modes of thinking, and of expressing our thoughts differ in different ages; the demand also for particular sorts of Learning is different, according to the questions, which are agitated,

and the opinions, which prevail. Viewing things in this light, I am not sensible, that our present Clergy are unworthy Successors of those eminent and venerable Men in that particular, where their reputation stood highest; that this merit of our Church is not transmitted down entire to our own times.

For much of controversial Learning there is no longer the same demand. At the Reformation and long after it, we were contending for the very essence of Religion; our most valuable rights, as Christians and as Citizens, were concerned in the dispute; it was necessary to direct our principal force to this quarter. Protestantism was also unfortunately divided in itself; and much unnecessary controversy about trifles between the different sects of it engaged men's attention and abilities, which would have been better employed

employed against that Church, from whose tyranny they had all been just rescued; or in establishing and defending the great truths of our common Christianity. Happily for our times these controversial weapons have been little wanted: Popery in this country is no longer an enemy worth contending with; and the Dissenters we have, I think, long considered as Friends, between whom and ourselves no cause of animosity subsisted, though some difference of opinion. Our Modern Clergy have, I believe, much less controversial learning than their Predecessors, because there has been much less occasion for it: a happy circumstance for us; Religious Controversy, as it has been usually carried on, being more apt to irritate the passions of the respective parties, than to convince their judgement.

The Writings of our Predecessors were more voluminous than ours; the controversial manner naturally led to this; it was also the fashion of the times; Readers as well as Writers had, if you please, more industry, certainly more patience, than at present. Almost every kind of composition assumed a prolix form, which suited the public taste, and with which it was therefore the inclination and interest of the writer to comply.

It must be confessed, that in these days we have had an opportunity of profiting by the labours of our Predecessors, and we may be reasonably expected to have improved upon them. In works of mere genius Predecessors afford little help; in those of mere science they afford the greatest. The subjects of Religious Learning are of a middle nature, in which great

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advantage

advantage is to be derived from those, who have gone before us; though not so great as in subjects strictly scientific. And I presume, that we shall not appear to have made an ill use of that stock of Religious Knowledge, which we have thus inherited.

The great truths both of Natural and Revealed Religion, and the duties resulting from them were perhaps never more ably discussed than by the Divines of our Present Church; these subjects are for the most part well understood, and the reasoning employed to establish them is just and convincing. For different ages have different modes of reasoning; it should seem as if the Human Mind were constituted differently at one time and another, from the different manner, in which it is at such times affected. We in many instances reject as futile and fallacious

fallacious that reasoning, which our ancestors were ready to take for strict demonstration. Things, which they considered as important enough to occasion the most serious and unhappy disputes, we now treat, and many of them very justly, as the merest trifles. We are perhaps hardly fair judges of our own comparative merits; but surely there is in the reasonings of the present age a degree of good sense, which we do not find so generally in our earlier Writers, and still less in those of other countries. If there be any truth in this, it is in no instance more true than on religious subjects; they are treated by our ablest Writers, and of such I am speaking, with more good sense and sound reasoning, than they have ever been before.

If we consult the theological writings of other Christian countries, we shall, I
 3 believe,

believe, soon be convinced of this with respect to them. But even in reading some of the most celebrated Authors of Antiquity on philosophical subjects, which are of the same nature and often coincide with religious subjects, I have frequently been led to reflect on the apparent inferiority of those Authors, with respect to just reasoning, to the more eminent of our modern Divines. We must divest ourselves of some prejudices, before we can venture to prefer an English Sermon, even of the first rate, on a philosophical or moral subject to a Dialogue of Plato, an Essay of Cicero or Plutarch; but with all reverence to those great men be it said, there will probably appear in the former, not perhaps the same elegance of form and language, but more good sense and just reasoning. It is not, that the abilities of any Modern Divine are superior to those of these illustrious Ancients;

Ancients; but our Religion has given us a more perfect knowledge of these subjects, and this is an age, with us at least, of better reasoning.

Good sense and a just manner of thinking arrange and employ the materials of what is commonly called Learning; make Knowledge useful and applicable to the important purposes of life. With the learning and knowledge also, which immediately belong to their Profession, our Clergy are eminently furnished. An acquaintance with general History, as connected with Revealed Religion, as well as with the particular History of the Religion itself, with Christian Antiquity, with the opinions and practices of Christians in different ages, especially those relating to our own country, is all of it in some measure necessary to Clerical Learning; but the great source, from whence all our Knowledge

Knowledge of Revealed Religion is derived, are the Holy Scriptures. In those other auxiliary branches of learning there is, I believe, no reason to complain of any deficiency; but in this most essential one, the study of the Holy Scriptures, the languages in which they were written were perhaps never better understood. With respect to the Old Testament, a new field of Criticism is laid open in it, to which our Ancestors had no access, and which will much contribute to restore that part of our Scriptures to their integrity, and to render our knowledge of them more accurate. For Commentaries on the whole Body of the Scriptures, we are indebted to many learned men of our own and of other countries, who have gone before us; their opinions thus collected are valuable and deserve to have weight with us; but we do not fail to judge for ourselves and to improve on their

their labours ; particular parts have been selected, and illustrated by able and masterly Criticism, and we are continually adding to our stock of Scriptural Knowledge. We shall soon be furnished with most of the proper requisites for an undertaking, which would do honour to the present age, as well to those who should authorise it, as to those who should conduct it with success ; a New Translation of the Scriptures. You, my Lord, have pointed out the way to us ; and it will be well, if we can follow You at some distance.

Although the spirit of Controversy between different denominations of Christians be in our days much subsided, yet there never was more frequent occasion to repel the attacks made on Christianity itself. Such is the Freedom of these times and of this country, that no subject is treated with less reserve and tenderness,

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than the Religion of it ; it is attacked in all ways, by subtle and acute reasoning, by learning, by the lighter sorts of writing which are agreeable and captivating ; all readers are addressed in a way suited to their respective tastes ; seriousness, ridicule, and irony are employed, as best answers the purpose ; which last is more offensive, because it is unnecessary. It is sufficiently plain, that with respect to Christianity at large the Freedom of Inquiry is not cramped by any influence of the Church or any coercions of the State. It is, I believe, the general sense of the Clergy, that when the truth of Religion is called in question and attacked, civil restraints are foreign to the defence of it ; that reason and argument are the only arms to be used for that purpose ; and that on these its defence may be safely rested, if it be, what they trust it is, founded in truth and derived from God. To them,

them, who are entrusted with the public administration of it, the province of defending it naturally belongs; and from them have issued, as occasions have required, the ablest Apologies for Christianity, which the world ever saw: its general principles have been established, objections in all their different forms have been answered, with more solid learning, sounder reasoning, and more good sense, than perhaps in any country, since the first propagation of it.

The learning and abilities of the English Clergy, not only in defence of Christianity against its adversaries, but in their general treatment of Religious Subjects, in their knowledge and interpretation of Scripture, in their explanation of the doctrines and duties of the Gospel, have always been held in high estimation by most of the other Protestant Countries

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in Europe. In Germany, as I am well-informed, English Divinity stands high in reputation; and is considered as a necessary part in the course of Clerical Studies to those, who profess to attain in them any great degree of proficiency and eminence.

Far be it from me, my Lord, to detract from the merit of our Dissenting Brethren for their joint labours with us in the common cause of Christianity. On the contrary, I have always considered them as Friends and Associates engaged in the same work; I have always seen with pleasure our agreement on the great truths and duties of Religion; and think it for the most part a recommendation, both of their performances and ours, where the differences subsisting between us are not marked; when the party, from which they come, cannot be distinguished.

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In such performances the merit of our Dissenters will always be acknowledged by every impartial judge of Learning, by every friend of Christianity; in such we shall both of us do real service to mankind, and acquire lasting reputation; while Posterity will despise and forget most of the paltry Controversies, with which our differences are continued and fomented.

The Restraint laid upon Opinions, the want of Freedom of Inquiry in religious subjects, is an inconvenience constantly charged on Establishments; in this respect it might be supposed, that those, who dissent from our Church, would have greatly the advantage of us. Yet in fact even the Dissenters can hardly propose their opinions with more freedom, than the Clergy of the Established Church; they can hardly censure that Church more
unreservedly,

unreservedly, than some of her own Members take the liberty of doing. A Clergyman does not indeed always in such cases profess himself the Author to the public by name; but it is generally as well known and understood, as if the name were written in capitals.

It must be confessed, Opinions are sometimes proposed, not very consistent with the former solemn Professions of their Authors. But who now ever hears of any thing like coercion or punishment? Is Heresy now a crime, that occurs in our Ecclesiastical Courts? Is it in any danger from Convocations, which are become of all public Assemblies the most unimportant and most innocent? In truth, the imputation of inconsistency is perhaps in the present state of things the most powerful restraint of opinions, that contradict those, which have the sanction of public authority.

thority. The liberty, thus taken and carried to such a degree, as we sometimes see it, may not itself be very consistent with the spirit of our Old Church and with the Forms of her Legal Constitution; but in this as in other matters men are relaxed in their ways of thinking; the general opinion favours this liberty; which in fact is enjoyed as fully, as if it were expressly allowed by the Laws of our Church; certainly as fully, as any moderate and reasonable men can desire. It is like our Toleration, which, though not complete by Law, yet has been completely exercised in Fact.

Every sort of Liberty may be carried to an extreme; but without a considerable degree of it, in religious as well as other subjects, learning is fettered, prejudices are continued, and improvement is stopped; it is better, that it should sometimes
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exceed its bounds, than be too much restrained; the field is always open for reason and good sense, to check what is extravagant and absurd. Of this moderate liberty the Clergy of England have made an excellent use in the promotion and improvement of every branch of religious knowledge. Neither have they any reason to fear, that those restrictive Laws, which have lain so long dormant and obsolete, should ever regain their life and vigour; on the contrary, the progress of things will certainly be made the other way, and Written Laws will at length accommodate themselves to Prevailing Opinions. It is laudable and ingenuous in our own Clergy, when occasions offer, to point out defects and to suggest amendments in our Establishment; it is honourable with respect to the Church herself, which allows this liberty to her members. But such writings should preserve that de-

corum and moderation, which is consistent with the relation the Authors of them bear to the Church, of which they treat. Satire and Invective against her will do no credit either to the good sense or good temper of a Writer of any denomination; but must come with peculiar impropriety from those, who have professed allegiance to her laws, and who subsist by her appointments.

The religious Learning then of the English Clergy seems in no danger of having its progress stopped by unreasonable restraints; its growth has been accordingly vigorous, and its produce abundant. But Learning, strictly speaking professional, is not only what may be expected from such a Body of men; we may reasonably hope to find among them a general literary character, a degree of proficiency, and in some instances of eminence,

eminence, in almost every branch of knowledge. Their own education, and the province which often falls to them of educating others, open a field in which they may pursue different parts of learning ; though that, which properly belongs to them, be their chief object. And this is connected with knowledge of almost every kind ; a relation subsists between the various branches of it ; they mutually assist and promote each other ; and by their general connection the mind of a speculative and studious man is imperceptibly led from one pursuit to another. In all the different views, which may be taken of Religion, in order to establish it and to obviate the objections which may be made to it, it is hard to name a part of knowledge, that may not have its use ; and for composition of every kind on religious subjects, it is obvious, how requisite it is for the Clergy to be well

acquainted with the best Authors of all ages, as patterns of good writing and just reasoning, if they hope to acquit themselves with reputation and effect. On the whole it is not unreasonable to expect, that there should be a general stock of useful and liberal knowledge lodged, as a deposit, in the hands of the Clergy.

In speaking of numerous bodies of men and the qualifications required from them, we speak of them always in the bulk. Every individual will not answer the general character; great eminence is, and ever was, confined to a few; if the greater part of a profession be competently qualified, and the number of those deficient comparatively small, it is perhaps all, that can in the nature of things be expected. The different situations also of the Clergy, and the different ranks of people with whom they are to officiate,

make their general qualifications requisite in very different degrees : in some situations they are all wanted ; in others the best and most excellent would be thrown away ; they would be inapplicable and useless.

From the times of the Reformation downwards, the reputation of the Church of England has certainly stood high for Religious Knowledge and Useful Literature. Have the Holy Scriptures in any country been more studied, or better illustrated by sound learning and true criticism ? Have the truths and duties of Christianity been any where explained more ably, or more faithfully inculcated ? Has Christianity itself been any where more successfully defended by the united force of reason and of learning ? Has religious knowledge been any where prosecuted with less restraint ? How far the Body of

our Clergy may now be qualified to keep up the reputation of their Church may perhaps in some measure be collected from the foregoing letter ; at least it may not become me too peremptorily to decide on it ; but, my Lord, I hazard nothing in saying, that we have certainly some names now among us, which will do no discredit to the most illustrious of our Predecessors.

LETTER

L E T T E R VII.

*On the Public Forms, and on the Duties
and Manners of the Clergy.*

WHOEVER, my Lord, has well considered the difficulty of composing Addresses to God, fit for public use, not unworthy of the Being who is worshipped, and yet intelligible to the meanest of his worshippers; whoever has well considered the judgement and sobriety of mind, which are necessary on a subject, in which we are so apt to indulge a warmth of imagination and to mistake it for piety; will not hesitate in determining, whether it be most expedient to have the addresses, made to God in Public Worship, conceived in certain
 3 general

general and prescribed Forms, or to have them left to the discretion and abilities of each particular Minister. To perform them, when thus left to the Minister, with tolerable success does indeed require a degree both of abilities and discretion, which can by no means be expected from the greater part of those who officiate; and it is obvious, how often reasonable men must in that case be disgusted with what is injudicious and improper.

* ‘ It is said to be unreasonable, that
 ‘ Christian Ministers should be confined
 ‘ to a stated Form in their Prayers more
 ‘ than in their Sermons ;’ as if there were not a striking difference. The Prayers pronounced by the Minister, and addressed to God, ought to be such, as all

* See Protestant Dissenter’s Catechism, Part ii.
 Quest. 42.

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the Congregation can join in and make their own; whereas Sermons are addressed to the Congregation, who are not to make them their own, but to hear and to judge of them. For those, who are always insisting on their Right of Private Judgement, will I presume exercise it upon the Sermons of their Minister, and not take all that he teaches them implicitly and upon trust. The absurdity, if there be any, in a Sermon is only the Minister's; in Prayers, the Congregation must adopt it, or must not pray. Not to mention, that the subjects of Moral and Religious Instruction admit of prodigious variety; whereas those of Prayer are comparatively few in number, and therefore easily reducible to stated Forms.

It can hardly ever happen, that in any thing, which has been a matter of dispute, one side can be exempt from all inconveniencies,

veniencies, and its opposite attended with no advantages. But not to trouble You, my Lord, with taking the unnecessary pains of proving, that in Public Worship the advantages attending stated Forms vastly preponderate, I will beg leave to offer some reflections on the Forms of our own Church.

They are certainly on the whole good: I do not mean good with respect to the particular religious opinions they express, for that is a consideration of quite another kind, but with respect to their Manner and Language; they are instruments well adapted to promote true and rational piety. God is addressed in them with simplicity, yet with dignity; a just sense of his transcendent attributes, and of our dependence on him, pervades the whole of them; they comprise all the various modes of addressing him, for the supply
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of our wants, for pardon of our sins, for benefits received, which our relation to him as Men and as Christians renders proper and necessary; the distribution and expression of these different modes is well calculated to awaken and to keep up our attention; there is warmth enough in them for the rational worshipper, though not perhaps for the enthusiast; and the ceremonies, with which our forms are accompanied, are few, decent, and intelligible. The Language also, in which they are composed, is for the most part peculiarly proper for the purpose; the Liturgy and English Bible have given, as a sort of standard, a degree of permanency to our whole language; they have in some measure fixed our taste with respect to that, which is proper for the public offices of Religion; and the cast of antiquity, with which they are tinged,

only

only serves to make them more simple and venerable.

But allowing our Public Forms all this merit, for one party to suppose them perfect, and for the other to reprobate them for not being so, is equally unreasonable. Perfect they could not be; and if that had been possible, they could not have appeared so to different men of different opinions. They would be unlike all other human performances, if they were not capable of improvement in a long course of time, from subsequent knowledge, from continued experience, from repeated observation, and let me add, from the censures of those who dissent from us. A Revision of our Forms by Authority would, my Lord, as I conceive, do honour to our Church; it would give it the true merit of being really
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more perfect, at the expence only of parting with an imaginary notion of perfection.

An impropriety has in some instances arisen from a change in the manner and time of performing the public services of the Church. Some of those, which were originally intended for different times, are now used together; for this reason they appear not well united; there are unnecessary repetitions now in them, which were not so in their separate state; and the whole is rendered too long and less uniform.

The Scripture, though we allow it all to be of divine authority, yet is not in all its parts equally fit for public and popular use. The Compilers of our Liturgy appear to have been of this mind; and have accordingly wholly omitted
several

several parts of it in the course of Lessons. It would be perhaps better, if still more were omitted, and replaced by other parts more useful and edifying. Some of the Apocrypha in particular, to which indeed we attribute no divine authority, has so much the air of legend and fable, that it by no means deserves a place in the service of our Church.

Those parts also of Scripture, which occur most frequently in our public worship, and are selected for the time, when our churches are fullest, should be the most edifying, should be the least liable to be misconstrued, and misapplied by the ignorant, either in their faith or practice. In this view, I cannot help thinking, that even some of the Psalms are not proper for a part of the service, which occurs so frequently. I should suppose too, that Lessons might be selected for

for Sundays and Holidays more improving than the present, more applicable to the belief and conduct of a Christian.

If ever such a Revision should take place, many alterations, few perhaps considerable, throughout the whole of our Liturgy would offer themselves, which would undoubtedly render it more perfect; more approved by the judicious Members of our own Church, and less exceptionable to those, who are disposed to censure it.

The Public Instruction of the Church of England is such as must always do her honour. It is on the whole able and edifying; the truths and doctrines of Christianity are explained with knowledge and good sense; the duties of it are inculcated with earnestness. Controversial subjects, useless and indeed unintelligible to most

congregations, are wisely almost banished from our pulpits; the discourses delivered from which tend to make the hearers good Christians in general, rather than zealous members of a particular Church, and partizans of a particular sect of Christianity.

I have not, I believe, said too much of our Public Instruction in general; but the best part of it is certainly excellent in its kind: the first-rate Sermons of the English Clergy, are probably the ablest performances of the sort, that ever were composed or delivered. And notwithstanding the general complaint, perhaps too well founded, of the infidelity of the age, of our want of all attention to religious subjects, there appears to be a constant demand for such discourses, as are excellent in their kind, and come from Authors of known and established reputation.

tation. In this commendation of the Sermons of the established Clergy I would join the Dissenters with them, as I have before done on the subject of Clerical Learning, with which indeed the composition of Sermons is connected. They have contributed their part to the excellent collection of English Sermons, of which the public is possessed. Theirs and ours are for the most part so much the same, that they may be used indifferently by both of us; a circumstance which I think both should observe with pleasure; for I do not wish to magnify the differences between us: we agree in so many things which are good and important, that I would never by choice dwell on many of the trifling particulars in which we differ.

The Sermons of our Clergy are usually precomposed and delivered from writing; this mode and the other of speaking an

unwritten discourse have, as it generally happens in other cases, their respective advantages and disadvantages. The first method will produce discourses more correct in all particulars, in reasoning, language, and method; the latter will have, when tolerably performed, more life and feeling. But when congregations, especially those of the better sort, have been long used to the accuracy and order of discourses written and prepared in private, they will not easily be satisfied with listening to those of an extempore Preacher; who, except he be a man of very eminent and superior abilities, must necessarily produce what is far short of that, which is the fruit of meditation and study. For the subjects of Religious Instruction cannot be treated before an audience with the same ease with those, which are usually discussed in other public Assemblies. They are many of them of a more nice

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and difficult nature; and however interesting in a philosophical and religious light the truths and duties of Christianity may be thought, yet in common life they will not engage men in the same degree with the popular business of the present moment, usually discussed in such assemblies. The interest men take in business of this kind supports both the spirit of the Speaker, and the attention of the Hearers, and in treating it we are by custom taught to expect less form and accuracy.

That the Clergy should discharge their duties with knowledge and ability, as well as be regular and punctual in them, is of the greatest importance; but these duties, however discharged, will by no means have their full effect, except they be accompanied by their own Example; except their Life and Manners be such,

as to recommend the Precepts they deliver, to evince their sincerity in the belief of those Truths which they profess to establish.

It is certain, they have peculiar motives for virtuous and exemplary conduct. The studies, the business of their profession naturally direct their mind to serious objects; it can hardly be supposed that the man, who is continually employed in telling others their duty, in offering to God their addresses, which consist of petitions for the relief of our wants, and for the forgiveness of our sins, of promises of obedience, of expressions of gratitude for his blessings, should do all this so mechanically and by rote, as not to make the application to himself, and to let it operate on his own conduct. He must reflect, if he reflects at all, that although obedience to the commandments
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of God be a universal obligation on all mankind, yet it comes with peculiar force on him, whose office it is to prevail on others by every motive to obey him; that the Teacher, who contradicts by his own life the instruction he delivers, and thus defeats the effect of it, must be inexcusable. And if a man cannot be influenced by better motives, without at least a decency of character there can be no tolerable prospect of success in the Clerical Profession; for however corrupt the world about us may be, and indulgent to vice, yet a vicious Clergyman is a character so very unbecoming in the sight of all people, that it seldom meets with indulgence, and certainly does not deserve it. So that without giving the Clergy credit for better natural dispositions than their neighbours, it may reasonably be expected, that their conduct should be better, even upon principle; at least, with

respect to the world, more decent and circumspect.

But notwithstanding all these particular motives, as they are made of the same materials with men of other professions, it cannot be supposed, that in every case these motives will have their due influence. To expect, that ten thousand men will always act well, because they are Clergymen, is to expect, what the condition of human nature will not admit. That their conduct should be in general good, that their lives should be innocent, that the decorum of their character should be preserved, is a reasonable expectation. It may be expected, that the want of this decorum should not be common; and that there should be very few instances of gross and public misbehaviour. When such instances happen, and happen rarely, to infer any thing from them to the discredit

credit of the profession itself, is not considering the nature of Man, the infirmities and faults to which he is liable, whatever may be the external situation in which he is placed.

If this be a reasonable measure for estimating the conduct of a Body of Clergy; I should flatter myself, that those of our own Church would at least come up to it; that the conduct of the bulk of them would be thought becoming their profession, and the instances of the contrary in any gross degree appear comparatively very rare. For in these cases the numbers, of which a Body of men consists, must always be taken into the account; and when a particular instance is considered, the proportion which it bears to the whole must be considered also. In this respect smaller sects have the advantage of the predominant religion of a country;

country ; their Ministers are few in number, and the very circumstance of their dissenting from the majority keeps them on their good behaviour.

Decorum in the Clerical Profession, and indeed in most others, does not depend on what is merely moral or immoral in the conduct of men, but has reference to present Manners. Prevailing habits and modes of thinking render things, in themselves indifferent, proper or improper, and give them a relative importance. Every prudent man must to a certain degree comply with these, if he would fill any station of life with credit to himself, or usefulness to others. The character of a Clergyman from the nature of it ought certainly to be marked with somewhat more seriousness, somewhat more regard to appearance even in innocent things, (for of immoralities I am not speaking)

speaking) than that of the generality of the world. But this decorum must be the decorum of the present age and of present manners; what our ancestors thought so would with us be stiffness and austerity, and would sit as awkwardly on us as their dress.

I am sensible, this is not the extreme, into which our Clergy are in danger of falling, the general propensity of the times running so strongly another way: dissipation and levity of character are the things in these days to be avoided. Yet without incurring the imputation of these, the manners of the Clergy may surely be such, it is I think desirable, that they should be such, as to fit them for the society of the world, not to exclude them from the better part of it; an ease of character, added to their higher qualifications of virtue and good sense,

sense, is most likely to recommend the Religion, of which they are Ministers *.

As it is to be wished, that the instruction and example of the Clergy should influence all ranks of men, the highest as well as the lowest; it is surely expedient, that they should not be viewed in a disagreeable or contemptible light by the former; and this will not disqualify them

* I cannot help mentioning, what I heard from a very intelligent Hessian Officer, of good character, who was in England with the troops of that country in the last war. He had been introduced to a Clergyman of eminence, one of the most chearful, polite, and amiable men in the world; he expressed the utmost surprise to me at finding him so agreeable a man; 'for, added he, as to the Clergy of our country, they are quite a different sort of people; we do not like them at all.' The manners of the German Clergy rendered them in general, I presume, unacceptable to men of the world; and unfit for their society.

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from being regarded properly by the latter, who are perhaps the first to despise those of a better station, whom they see approach too nearly to themselves.

An English Clergyman of Knowledge in his profession, punctual in the Duties of it, and unblemished in his Character, if to these qualifications he joins those accomplishments of general Learning, and that agreeableness of Manners, of which many of our Clergy are possessed, bids perhaps as fair, my Lord, to command proper respect, and to acquire useful influence with all ranks of people, as any Christian Minister in any country, where Christianity is professed.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

Conclusion.

I HAVE thus, my Lord, ventured to offer You my thoughts, as they occurred to me, with much freedom, on the Present State of our Church-Establishment. It must be left to your Lordship's judgement, and to that of the Public, if these Letters should deserve the attention of the Public, to determine, how far the representation I have given of the different parts of the subject be just; I can only say, that I have represented them in the light, in which they appear to me.

It is a subject, my Lord, which if pursued more at large would afford room for
 3 much

much discussion, for many different opinions; in which continual panegyric is not to be expected, much less continual censure to be apprehended; for if we should suspect with reason the sincerity of the one, we should reprobate with still more reason the injustice and malevolence of the other. I must repeat what I have said already more than once, that in estimating the merit of Human Institutions, and of Numerous Bodies of Men, we should not raise our expectations above the standard of Humanity. The characters of all Societies, formed for the civil or religious purposes of mankind, will be mixed, like those of the Individuals of which they are composed; to expect Perfection in them implies an ignorance of our nature; we must take those for good, which are good on the whole; and be satisfied, if we mean to be satisfied in this world, with persons and things, where

where the defects are comparatively few, and the good considerably predominant.

It is in this view, my Lord, and with such expectations only, that I have pursued these reflections. How far the Church-Establishment, as it now subsists in this country, is an Institution fit for the purposes it was meant to answer, both with respect to Religion and Society; how far the Clergy of England are worthy Ministers of the Religion of Christ, and useful Members of our Civil Community, were the objects of my inquiry. Whether I have estimated the merits both of the Establishment and its Clergy by their proper measure, whether the conclusions I have drawn are reasonable or not, others will determine; I do not pretend to prescribe to them the judgement they shall form; but if what I have said shall in any degree approve itself to your Lordship

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in particular, and to any other candid, liberal, and intelligent readers, in whose way these letters may fall; if it shall suggest to them any topics, which may assist them in forming their own judgment, the purpose of this address will be fully answered.

I am not more desirous, that such readers should be satisfied with those parts of our Church-Establishment, which appear to me good and unexceptionable, than I am, that their attention should be directed to those parts, which are capable of improvement, and which call for it. Though it must be expected, that all Human Institutions will have their defects; this is no reason, why endeavours should not be used to lessen and correct them; to render their proportion to what is good as small as possible. Length of

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time and change of circumstances produce of themselves unforeseen inconveniences in things, which were planned at first with the greatest wisdom; they make what was originally well adapted to the purposes intended, unfit and inapplicable; they produce improvements in knowledge, which in justice to ourselves we should adopt; so that Human Institutions of every kind will grow, from these causes only, less perfect and less useful, except they are from time to time refitted and readjusted.

This must be the case of every National Church, which has long subsisted; and it seems reasonable to use the same conduct with respect to that, as all wise nations do in other parts of legislation; to make such alterations and amendments in Ecclesiastical regulations, as any improvements

provements in religious knowledge, or
 change of circumstances may require.
 That this should be done not wantonly
 or unnecessarily, will readily be admitted;
 but we surely seem too tender, too much
 afraid of moving a stone of our Church,
 as if on being touched, though ever so
 gently, the whole fabric would fall to
 pieces: I trust there is in it more strength
 and solidity. There might be reason for
 this excessive caution, if the Church were
 now, as it once was, an instrument of
 party, and the very name of it sufficient
 to set half the nation in a flame; but
 now, my Lord, bad consequences are
 very little to be apprehended on account
 of any wise and useful alterations, which
 should be recommended to the Legislature
 by the Governors of our Church; they
 would be well received by the modera-
 tion and good sense of the better part of
 the nation, to the inattention and indif-

ference of most others they would be uninteresting. Such improvements may be made, without affecting the great principles, on which our Establishment is founded, or changing its essential parts; by being so improved its virtues would be more acknowledged, its utility more apparent.

The Clergy, who act under it, have every motive to render themselves, what by their character and situation they are qualified to be, worthy Ministers of the Religion of Christ, and useful Members of our Civil Community. Their Predecessors, a generation or two backward, could not perhaps as a Body of men be esteemed favourable to that system of Liberty, which took place at the Revolution; they could not immediately divest themselves of old prejudices concerning Government. But these subsist

no longer ; Civil Liberty perhaps owes more to one Great * Man of the Clerical Profession, than to any other single Writer of any denomination. The principles, on which it is founded, are diffused at large throughout the Clergy, and as generally adopted by them, as by any other Class of men. If they should be charged by the over-zealous Friends of Liberty with not carrying their notions of it far enough, further than they are authorised by the legal principles of our Government, to that charge I believe they would plead guilty in its utmost extent ; for they are bound by every tie of duty and interest to preserve and support, as far as lies in them, our Present Civil Constitution.

I reflect on this and on our Ecclesiastical Establishment with nearly the same

* Hoadly.

sentiments. Notwithstanding the many defects and corruptions in the former, which candid men will allow, and the uncandid will exaggerate; yet when I see, that in this country we are more free, more secure in our persons and property, than the inhabitants of any country have been, whose history is transmitted to us; that justice is administered in our Courts of Law with a purity, of which there is no example; that this Constitution has in fact produced for near a century, more public and private happiness, than any government which has ever yet subsisted; I must conclude, that it is on the whole excellent, however improveable in some of its parts; that it deserves the warmest affection and most faithful support of all its members. So likewise, however injuriously our Whole Church-Establishment may be sometimes treated by passionate men; though reasonable and moderate men may think, that in some of its Parts it wants

correction

correction and is capable of amendment ; yet, when I consider its Spirit of Toleration towards other sects of Christians, the Freedom with which Religious Inquiry is pursued under it, the Learning and Abilities of its Clergy, their Literary Productions in the Support of Christianity and for Instruction in it, with the general Decorum and Propriety of their Manners, I cannot help concluding, that the Present Church of England on the whole deserves the esteem and veneration of our own age, and that it will hereafter be considered by Posterity as a worthy and illustrious branch of Christ's Universal Church.

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